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ART. I. — *Raccolta di Romanzi Storici originali Italiani.*
Collection of Original Italian Historical Romances.
Florence. 1830.

IT has often been considered as a singular phenomenon in the literary history of Italy, that a people remarkable for lively and inventive genius should have accomplished so little in the department of Historical Romance. Nor has the surprise, generally felt upon this subject, been diminished by a more attentive examination of the history and literature of this nation; the one abounding with romantic incident and striking developments of wild passion and strongly marked character; the other, rich in accurate and powerful descriptions of real events, and still richer in fascinating pictures of the most enchanting creations of the imagination. Nature too would seem to have performed her part, in the character which she has imprinted upon the scenery of the country, and in the materials of romantic embellishment, which she has interwoven, with a lavish hand, in every line of its varied features. Plains, mountains, and quiet valleys; wild torrents, and broad, majestic streams; gigantic fragments, which carry the mind beyond the days of authentic history; and noble ruins, which attest the reality of that history which the long lapse of ages has made romance for us; an air, whose breath calls forth every latent seed of poetry, and gives a charm even to the monotony of daily life; these are

among the features of romance which nature has scattered over the external aspect of the country. And still deeper are the principles which she has implanted in the hearts of its inhabitants. How then has it come to pass, that they have accomplished so little, where every thing would seem to promise the highest success ?

The character, which the literature of every nation assumes, from the first moment of its formation, depends upon a variety of local and incidental causes. Its strongest traits, those which it preserves through every period of its revolutions, will necessarily be derived from the peculiarities of national character ; and the same causes, which contribute to the formation of the one, will act constantly and effectually upon the other. It is thus that climate and natural scenery acquire their influence, giving a distinctive tone to its poetry, and forming as it were the shade and coloring of its pictures. It is thus, also, that the political situation of every country, or, more properly speaking, its political character, takes a part in that of its literature, and is manifested with more or less fulness in all its literary productions. Language too comes in for its share in this general formation, and while it borrows many of its peculiarities from those of the minds that employ it, communicates to them, in turn, a portion of its own original spirit ; like the stream, which, in part, derives its beauty or its grandeur from that of the landscape through which it flows, and at the same time shares with that landscape its own distinctive features, softening its beauty, or adding new majesty to its grandeur.

The influence of these causes may be considered as general, and can easily be traced in the early history of every literature. Others, scarcely less important, were peculiar to the revival of letters in Italy. But none have so immediate a bearing upon our subject, as the direction which the three great men, by whom this revival was accomplished, gave to the studies of their contemporaries, and through them to those of the following century.

First among them was Dante, who came at once to guide and be guided by the passions which were in action around him. In him the romantic gallantry of the Troubadours was refined into the pure and devoted love that led to the deification of his Beatrice. The subtle metaphysics of the schoolmen were elevated to the profound and sublime, though often obscure and extravagant, theology of the "Paradiso" ; while the

virulence of party had no small share in the judgments which suggested the terrific descriptions of the "*Inferno*." Dante, in short, or rather the form which his genius assumed, was in a great measure the consequence of the character of his age, and of the general causes to which we have already alluded. But the inspiration, which he had derived from these, he in turn communicated to others. The "*Divina Commedia*" became the model of all those, who aimed at the higher flights of poetry; and, as is ever the case, the streams which were thus drawn forth, and taught to flow, by art, ran slow and silently by the side of those which had sprung from deep natural sources.

Similar in kind, though not in degree, was the influence of *Petrarca*. Never had romantic passion been sung so sweetly; never had gallantry and love been so blended; never had philosophy and nature been so lavish of their treasures, the one to describe passion, the other to illustrate and adorn it. A soft, bewitching charm floated around the "*Canzoniere*"; and as the contemporaries and successors of *Petrarca* listened to the melody, each, like the Passions at the cave of Music, seized the lyre and sought

"To prove his own expressive power."

It was not by verse that *Boccaccio* formed his school. But a prose whose full, harmonious flow approached the varied melody of Latin eloquence; a language which seemed to adapt itself to every subject, while, in truth, it raised the lowest subjects to its own standard, veiling the coarseness of vulgar details, and giving an irresistible attraction to the most harrowing descriptions, by the charm of words and idioms, grave or gay, thrillingly powerful, or gracefully expressive, and everywhere so appropriate, that five centuries of constant study have produced nothing more perfect; this was the art by which the father of Italian prose won so large a train of disciples into the path which he had opened. The school of *Boccaccio*, though not so large as that of *Petrarca*, was larger and more durable than that of Dante. The *Tales*, or "*Novellette*," which he carried to the highest point of perfection, still form an integral part of Italian literature; and there are few of its great prose writers who have not drawn from this fountain as from the purest source of eloquence.

Such was the direction first given to Italian literature. The three great men, by whom this impulse was communicated, laid at the same time the foundation of another school, whose

effects may be traced throughout every period from the days of Dante to our own times. We mean the *classic school*. The veneration, which they felt and invariably manifested for the ancient classics, fell little short of religious devotion. But the study of these pure models of taste and eloquence was pursued with a spirit, worthy both of the disciple and of the master. It was not a mere poetic fiction, which represented Virgil as the guide of Dante. Every step, which the Italian of the Middle Ages took in the three realms of the catholic creed, was directed by the spirit of his master. Who that studies the "*Divina Commedia*," even in those passages, where the poet, entangled in the web of his theology, strives to explain what cannot be explained, and almost succeeds, by the force of language, in giving form and reality to the subtle distinctions of his school of metaphysics, can deny that it was from the study of Virgil alone that he learned to give to words that magic and long-forgotten power? And although in reading the Latin works of Petrarca, we may often find it difficult to believe that Cicero and Virgil were the avowed models of his style, yet the grace, the harmony, and the polished correctness of his Italian verses, clearly show how much his taste had been elevated and refined by his familiarity with the Latin classics.

But with their followers this study was degraded into a servile imitation of manner, and a dry analysis of forms. They had no knowledge of that imitation, which refines the taste, without fettering the action of the mind, which shows where and how the forms of one work may be adapted to another, and transfuses, as it were, the spirit of ancient beauty into productions which bear all the characteristics of their own age. But although the scholars of this class accomplished but little in real literature, their labors were far from being destitute of utility. The sixteenth century showed, that, however dry the pursuits of the fifteenth, they had prepared the way for a great and direct advance. The men, who so successfully resumed the work, commenced by the three great writers of the fourteenth century, were like them endowed with that original genius, which, while it avails itself of all that has been accomplished by others, creates more than it borrows, and gives even to the ideas and inventions of other men an air of originality and a coloring of its own. They were deeply imbued with the classic spirit, which prevailed in all the studies of the age; but they partook of it as their masters had done.

Style, elegance of description, elevation of philosophy, polish of language, all were classic; but the subjects and tone of their works were modern and original. The metrical romances, which Ariosto carried to that pitch of perfection, which has justly made it doubtful to whom the laurel of Italian epic belongs, were more numerous than the imitations of Dante, or of Boccaccio, or in short of any class except the lyric poems of Petrarca. Thus divided between the schools of Visions, of Lyric Poetry, of Prose Tales, and of Metrical Romances, the genius of Italy found sufficient variety in forms of its own invention, to employ all its powers. When, finally, the example of Tasso had shown how well the ancient epic could be adapted to the spirit of modern poetry, and when the revival of comedy and tragedy had begun to excite the emulation of all classes of writers, nothing but a very peculiar combination of circumstances could have led to the invention of a new branch of literature.

Such a combination was far from taking place. Italy had long ceased to be a nation. The great interests, the strong feelings, the ardent aspirations after freedom, which had preceded the first revival of letters, had disappeared; or, where they still continued to exist, but added new force to that truth, already too evident, that individual virtues, when foreign to the age, serve but to call down contempt and misery upon those, who were formed to be under other circumstances the benefactors of mankind. The nation, which had hitherto been the guide of Europe, then became, in part, the humble follower of her own disciples. Translations, imitations, and servile copies, succeeded to original creations in almost every department; and the corruption, extending to the language, seemed to threaten her literature with total destruction. Yet this very period gave rise to some of her choicest works in history and in science; and some of the brightest names in the scientific history of Europe are to be found among the Italians of this degraded epoch. The musical drama also, as every reader of Metastasio knows, from a merely idle recreation, became a branch of permanent literature, no less fascinating from the charms of its verse, than instructive by its truth to nature. Tragedy, comedy, and satire in its more extended and artificial form, though each can boast but a single name, were carried to a very high point of perfection.

There has been no time, therefore, in which Italy has not

been distinguished by a certain degree of intellectual activity, and has not made some progress in creative literature. But, at the same time, there has been a constant tendency toward the formation of particular schools, and, except in the case of those great men, who, however they may be situated, strike out a path for themselves, a strong disposition to follow in the beaten track of some well-known guide. The true source of this must be sought rather in the political condition of the country, than in the natural character of the Italians. But it is in this tendency, that we must seek for one of the causes of the constant neglect of the fuller historical novel, which although contemporary with the "*Divina Commedia*," first appeared in so rough or rather uninviting a form, as to hold out no attractions for men capable of relishing the superior beauties of the different writers, whose names we have had occasion to repeat so often.

This applies only to those writers of the second class, by whom in every country this department is almost exclusively filled. The reasons, which have kept back the higher order of men from this attractive field, lie still deeper in the character and history of the people.

The first of these we shall merely allude to, without venturing to enlarge upon it. It is found, we are at a loss whether to say, in the peculiar cast, or in the absolute want of society. Here, as in some other cases, the general fact is apparent, but can only be illustrated by those who have made profound and extensive observations, with the advantages which no foreigner has, to our knowledge, ever obtained, of a free admission into Italian circles.

The second, and one which seems to us to have contributed more than any which we have hitherto mentioned, to retard, and perhaps render impossible, the success of the novelist in Italy, is the peculiarly romantic character of Italian history. Of the romantic cast of its scenery and of its people we have already spoken. The peculiar relations in which Italy has stood with regard to the rest of Europe, and to the different states of her own territory, during the most important periods of her history, have brought these materials into play, in a manner which has left nothing to be done by the warmest imagination. In the place of one people, united under the same government and impelled by the same motives, we find the whole population divided into rival states. Where the craggy

peaks and wild fastnesses of the mountains offered a shelter for crime, or a secure retreat for feudal pride, the bandit built his tower, or the noble his castle. Amid the fertile plains of Lombardy, along the banks of the streams which roll their waters to the Mediterranean or to the Adriatic, the combined exertions of a bold and hardy populace had erected the walls of their independent cities. In none of these situations did the current of life flow smoothly. The robber traced from his watch-tower the movements of the inhabitants of the plain or valley, and hastened to plant his ambuscade at the first turn of the path. The noble closed or opened, at pleasure, the passes which his castle commanded, or, when least expected, descended with a train of daring vassals to carry destruction to the fields and sometimes even to the gates of the wealthy cities, which he coveted and despised. In these, in place of the bustling, cheerful, regular movement of industrious citizens, the cares of business and the turmoils of faction were wildly blended. Each house was a fortress, each street the field of innumerable conflicts. Commerce itself was a constant warfare; and the fleet, that sailed for trade, went armed for resistance or for conquest. Thirst of wealth, ambition of power, party spirit excited to exasperation, and public jealousy ripened to the profoundest hatred, all that passion has of virulent and cruelty of terrific, were found in the events of those ages. The bloody contests, which prevailed in the free cities, and gave to the daily life of every citizen the fearful excitement and uncertainty of war, would almost sicken us at the terrors of an ill-regulated freedom; while the insatiable cruelty of an Ezze-lino, or the inhuman ferocity which suggested the pastimes of a Visconti, present such pictures of the excesses of tyranny, as would dispose us to choose any state rather than be exposed to the capricious jealousy of individual power. But when the mind shrinks, loathing and horror-struck, from the contemplation of these scenes, and is ready to deny the value of descriptions which seem to present nothing but a repetition of unnatural crimes, interest of another kind, characters of a different cast, arrest its attention, and fix it upon these pages of blood. Amid the merciless contests of faction, and at the side of remorseless tyranny, patriotism assumes a form and a power, which circumstances less trying could never have developed. The wild energy of the poetry and sublime daring of the architecture we still admire, were caught from the events and neces-

sities of those times ; and it was by that terrific conflict of barbarous passions, that human nature was redeemed from the debasement of the empire, and Europe put into that path of civilization, which has enabled us to judge with so rigid a justice the virtues and the vices of her infancy.

To whatever portion of Italian history we direct our attention, we shall find the same powerful and romantic development. Ferrucci, the final hope of Florence in her last, long struggle for freedom, sinking beneath the sword of his assassin, and calmly replying to the blows with which a savage hatred vented its fury, "Thou but strikest a dead man!" would furnish a no less striking character for romance, than young Corradino renouncing the charms of power and ease, to reclaim at the point of the sword the heritage of his fathers, and paying upon the scaffold the penalty of his daring and of his virtues. What might not be made of the life of Filippo Strozzi, whose mind presented the two extremes of elevation and of debasement, as his history was marked by those of prosperous and of adverse fortune? Or where can we look for richer materials than we find in that of his sons Piero and Leone, where daring adventures, strong passions, and variety and grandeur of enterprise, combine to form a history that would task the ablest pen?

Were the composition of historical romance as easy as we are apt to suppose ; were it so light a task, as at the first glance, it appears, to combine the truths of history with the creations of imagination, in such a manner as to reproduce and illustrate the events of distant and interesting periods, the circumstances which seem to render Italian history so favorable to fiction, would really prove what they seem. But it is in fact an undertaking, which requires the highest exertions of the most gifted minds. Its basis is truth ; and history must be thoroughly and skilfully studied. Its illustrations are those general traits of character and those every-day occurrences of life, which, though so deeply rooted in our nature as to be renewed in every age, are yet so flexible and subtile in their details, that they adapt themselves to and mingle with the leading characteristics of each. Its embellishments are like those of poetry, and must be drawn from the carefully gathered stores of an observant and reflecting mind, and so disposed, as to act, at the will of the writer and with the full force of his art, upon the fancy, the judgment, or the heart.

When an Italian, possessed of power equal to such an undertaking, enters upon the study of his native history with a view to illustrate it, he cannot long hesitate concerning the course which he should choose. For him, more than for any other writer, is the composition of history a task of deep responsibility. He is responsible to the ages that are gone, for the manner in which he repeats their lessons of awful warning. He is responsible to posterity, for the weight which every word he writes, every character he paints, will throw into the scale of their happiness or of their misery ; aiding to forge the fetters that are to bind, or to work out the freedom that is to gladden them. He is responsible to his contemporaries, and severe will be the account that he must render them ; and well does he know, that as he suffers his mind to be swayed by the passions of his own times, he is preparing for himself the suspicions and the hatred either of his government, or of his countrymen at home ; a garret in Paris, or a dungeon in Speilberg.

Taking up his pen with such feelings and with such prospects, it is hardly possible for an Italian of genius to fix upon romance rather than history, as the medium of communication with his contemporaries, and with that posterity, upon which, more than the writer of any other country, he is dependent for his reward. Every step he takes, in the course of his researches, confirms this decision. The chronicles and documents, which supply his materials, contain pictures and descriptions of so striking and dramatic a cast, that he feels as it were transported, by the simple and energetic language of the writer, to the very scene which he is describing. His own mind catches the glow ; and, kindling into enthusiasm, he repeats the tale with that magic power of narrative and description, which raises Italian history, in this particular, above that of every other nation.

Another circumstance, wholly dependent upon the political situation of Italy, concurs with these in retarding the progress of the historical novel, if it should not rather be considered as opposing an insuperable obstacle to its success. We are fond of speaking of the ennobling and refining influence of literature, and of the glory of renouncing the coarser occupations of life for those elevated pursuits, which extend the sphere of our actions and of our influence to the remotest posterity. That these sentiments really do mingle with the varied motives

which guide the pens of a large proportion of writers, is a truth that we should be loth to deny. That one still purer, the love of literature for itself; the delight which every creative genius must experience in contemplating those forms of beauty, which arise under its own hand; the rapturè which every elevated soul must feel in going onward from link to link in the great chain of moral and physical truth, which binds this vast system of the universe; that these motives still continue to act upon some minds, and will go on purifying the spirit of literature, is so fascinating, so winning a belief, that we should dread to find it untrue. But it cannot be denied that motives of a very different cast are at least as often listened to, as any of those, which have so long (and might we not say, so vainly?) formed the ideal perfection of literary character. The sacrifice of permanent glory to the thirst for immediate applause is not peculiar to our own, nor to any times. It has acted with more or less power in all ages, and often upon the highest, as well as upon the lowest order of minds. It has assumed different aspects, adapted to the nature and to the necessities of the moment. It has sacrificed poetry to the corruptions of a false taste, and history to the passions of the great. It has made eloquence the vehicle of corruption, and rendered satire subservient to the littleness of personal malice. The duties which literature imposes have been neglected; the deep responsibilities of genius have been forgotten; and here, as everywhere, where reputation becomes the sole end of our exertions, each aspirant has stripped himself for the contest without a thought beyond the prize at which he aims.

This passion no longer stands alone, if indeed it ever did. A more powerful stimulant, and more in unison with the spirit of our age, acts with it. The one is dependent upon the other; and the gratification of the former is invariably attended by the full success of the latter. One who should attempt to renew the once just complaints concerning the neglect of literary merit, would have to go back another century in search of his examples. Genius is not only esteemed, but rewarded; nor that with empty praise alone, but with a large share of that wealth and influence, which are supposed to constitute the happiness of life, and can really command its comforts. Nothing can be more just; nothing can contribute more powerfully towards placing intellectual superiority upon its proper basis. The man of letters, who derives all his power from

the resources of his own mind; who, with no other reliance than his pen, is enabled to compete with pride of birth and with hereditary wealth, and who, when assailed by misfortune, and entangled in perplexing and harassing embarrassments, can draw from the inexhaustible treasures of his own intellect, the means, not merely of resistance, but of triumph; such a man does more towards establishing the superiority of mental, over every other form of power, than volumes of rapturous panegyric, or of metaphysical analysis.

The lot of genius was certainly never cast in better days. How far literature itself has gained by the change, may fairly be considered as a subject open to dispute. It is a question, however, which can only be decided by those, who at the distance of another century shall trace the literary history of that which is now passing. For our parts, it is a question which we can never approach, without feeling ourselves involved in perplexing doubts. And if at times we share in the pleasure, with which every one must view this triumph of intellect, at others we can hardly repress the conviction, that the success of the individual is won with more than a partial sacrifice of the cause in which he is engaged.

But the point more closely connected with our present subject, is the influence of the pecuniary success of popular writers in directing their attention to particular branches of literature. Nor can it require illustration. Surrounded as we are with every form of proof, which can be required in order to show how close a connexion subsists between popular taste and the taste of popular writers, it is impossible to hesitate in our conclusions. Nor should we suffer ourselves to be deceived by a change of terms. Popular taste is but a synonyme for interest; and compliance with the former means nothing more than a discreet obedience to the dictates of the latter. Hence we find genius of a high order laboring in the composition of ephemeral productions, and pouring forth volume after volume of works, in which its own taste must find much to condemn and still more to amend. Hence we see the crowd of imitators, which, numerous as it always has been, exceeds any thing that the annals of literature have hitherto recorded, and which, watching every fluctuation in public taste, follows blindly wherever it turns.

These circumstances naturally suggest a form of literature, by which the writer can constantly hold such a place in the pub-

lic eye, as to secure the favor of a large class of readers ; the only sure path to the purse of his publishers. This cannot be done by history, for the composition of history requires long, and patient, and laborious research ; nor by poetry, unless the bard be gifted with the fertile genius of a Byron ; nor by philosophy, nor by any branch of science, for however extensive and durable the fame, which success in these departments may secure, it can seldom be attended by popular favor, or extensive gain. Prose fiction, whether in the form of novels or of tales, whether grounded upon facts, or derived from the imagination of the writer, is the only branch of literature, which can gratify at once the passion for immediate reputation and pecuniary profit. This enables him to keep constantly before the public ; to prevent his readers, by the regularity of his appearance, from losing sight of him amid the crowd that never fails to flock into every successful path ; and when he has once secured attention by writing well, to command it at will by the mere authority of his name.

We have dwelt upon this point longer than we had intended, from an anxiety to induce our readers to examine and weigh carefully the correctness of our views, before we proceeded to uncover the other side of the picture. The inducements, which we have represented as contributing so much towards the cultivation of romance by men of great intellectual power, exist not in Italy. The division of the territory into petty states, and under the dominion of different families, renders the privilege of copy-right, even where it can be obtained, of little or no advantage. No sooner is a work announced in one part of the country, than the publishers of other states, and often those of different cities within the same states, prepare themselves for its appearance. If it proves successful, it is immediately reprinted wherever there is a chance of finding purchasers. If it be a failure, the first publisher feels the loss and nobody ever hears of it again. But as far as the pecuniary interest of the author is concerned, both cases, success and failure, are nearly alike in their consequences. He gains nothing, or at best but a trifle. Were this all, there would still be a certain appearance of justice in his lot. But he has often to lose in his own person, and, while struggling with poverty, to view, without the power of reclamation, the profits which others derive from the productions of his genius. An example which we have from the lips of the individual himself,

will place this melancholy truth in a stronger light, than any observations of ours can possibly do. Botta's History of the American Revolution is well known in this country; and the translation of it has passed through two editions under the sanction of American copy-right. The French translator, also, was liberally rewarded for his labors by the publishers of Paris. In Italy, the editions of the original text have been multiplied in every part of the country; and have proved in every form, a fruitful source of gain to the editors. What in the mean while was the reward of the author? He had drawn upon his scanty patrimony in order to defray the expenses of the original publication; for no bookseller could be found in Paris willing to undertake it at his own risk. While the Italian reprints and the French translation were obtaining an unexampled circulation, the copies of the first edition were lying a dead weight upon the hands of the author; and he was at last constrained to sell six hundred of them, at the price of waste paper, for a few sous a pound, in order to purchase for his wife the privilege of dying in her native land.

What then can induce the Italian to renounce the ease of a life of indolence, or the advantages of commerce, for the cares and anxieties, and in speaking of Italy we must add, the dangers, of literature? We know of but two causes at all adequate to such a result. The love of literature for itself; and the thirst for a durable reputation. To these should be added, but as acting with them, rather than as a separate cause, the hope of doing something towards the regeneration of his fellow citizens.

That the love of letters does exist in Italy, if not in perfect purity, at least free from the corruptions by which it is tarnished in other countries, would seem to be sufficiently evident from what has already been stated with regard to the situation of its votaries. And in fact, when, on the one hand, we consider the obstacles which obstruct the path of the man of letters, in this unhappy land; his sacrifice of peace and of domestic quiet; the alternative to which so many are reduced of choosing between a prison and an exile, and the meagre and uncertain rewards which attend the most successful exertions; and, upon the other, contemplate the ardor with which the best talent of the land consecrates itself to literature, and the unwavering devotion, with which it meets every sacrifice and hardship that its choice imposes; we are struck with an admi-

ration which we had never felt before, and are compelled to acknowledge that beautiful arrangement of Providence, which, when every ordinary motive would turn us back from the paths of intellectual culture, decks them with a winning, an irresistible loveliness, stronger than the suggestions of indolence, or the attractions of interest. Neither is the prospect of an ephemeral reputation, overshadowed as it is by cares and vexations, and deprived of all the advantages, which in other countries make it attractive, sufficient to account for the literary devotion of a modern Italian. He undoubtedly labors for applause; but the fame after which he endeavors is that tardy fame, which is sculptured upon the tomb, and which, by an unaccountable, though undeniable illusion, reconciles man to the trials which he actually endures, by the hope of those tributes of love and veneration which he can neither hear nor enjoy.

If the view which we have taken of the personal inducements to literary exertion in Italy be correct, it will necessarily follow that men of genius will choose that course, which promises to lead more directly and surely to the reward after which they aspire; or, in other words, they will naturally adopt that branch of literature, which gives the greatest security of durable fame. We can hardly be accused of rashness or of prejudice, when we assert, that of all the various forms of composition, although none may lead more promptly than romance to immediate applause, yet none is so insecure a guide to permanent reputation. It was one of the first inventions of modern literature. It was one of the earliest and most curious pictures of the Middle Ages. It has followed every turn of society, and everywhere adapted itself to the feelings and character of the age. But, as these give place to new feelings and to new character, the fictions which formed the delight of one century have been almost instantly forgotten, if not caricatured and despised, in the next. Nor has this proceeded more from those changes in our pursuits and in our mode of life, which call for a concurrent change in works of this kind, than from the nature of the writing itself, which, holding a middle station between poetry and history, and neither shackled by the difficulties of the one, nor requiring the laborious research of the other, presents temptations to the formation of habits of carelessness and haste, which few have the strength or the courage to resist. Our own age

has already witnessed the rise of three new forms. Two of them, though at first hardly less popular than the other, are nearly forgotten. The third, and most recent, still survives. Whether it be destined to share the fate of its predecessors, is a question which cannot yet be decided. Bound as we still are by the spell that it has thrown around us, we are unable to see beyond the magic circle, and tell how far the current that has swept away every other class will carry this. Then it is distinguished from all others by one great advantage. With the same privilege of taking its subjects from real life, and thus representing human nature as it is, it possesses the additional one of throwing light upon those parts of history, over which the pen of the historian passes with a faint and rapid stroke. But history has accused it of yielding too often to the temptation of misrepresenting and falsifying its pictures, and this even in the hands of the greatest of its masters. Here the advantages and disadvantages are peculiar to this class. In every other respect, and in the fatal facility with which it may be written, it is upon a level with all other prose fiction.

But these disadvantages, notwithstanding their tendency to repress that ardor, without which no writer can hope for success, might be overlooked by the Italian, were it possible for him to believe that this might be rendered more subservient to the cause of Italy, than any other kind of composition, and that, whatever his fate as a writer, he would have secured the gratification of contributing something towards the future prosperity of his country. But he cannot fail to perceive, how inadequate and ill-calculated such an instrument is to the accomplishment of what every enlightened Italian aspires after. Were Italy really oppressed with that torpor which many suppose, scarce any thing could be better adapted to rouse her, than that exciting mixture of historic truth and high colored fiction, which acts so powerfully upon the warm blood of the south. But the tragedies of Alfieri have done more towards forming the Italians to that stern and elevated patriotism which is essential to a successful effort for freedom, than romance ever has or ever could have done; and the events of the last forty years have scattered those seeds, which, even though they fall upon stony ground or by the way-side, never fall in vain. Italy now requires the slow but certain guidance of sober history. At the side of those passions which should

work out her freedom, are those wild and fanciful hopes, which, if left to their free play, would poison all its sources. It is only by chastening these in the school of real life, that so fatal a catastrophe can be prevented. Excitement and passion have done their part. If reason, speaking with the voice of experience, be listened to, they will not have done it in vain. Whatever has a tendency to work upon the imagination, and carry excitement beyond the point which it has already reached, although it may hasten the moment of action, and produce by a convulsive effort that which the natural course of events is inevitably bringing about, will retard, for at least another century, the true progress of Italy and of Europe.

Thus the only causes, which seem to us capable of moving the minds of Italians of the highest order, tend to confirm that neglect of historical romance, which has prevailed at every period of their literary history. As long as these remain in force, so long will the success of this school be doubtful. Literature has always been the child of circumstances; and they alone of her followers have been successful, who have known when to yield to their impulse, and when to temper it. For the last twelve years, there has been a struggle in Italy, between the state of things which we have hastily sketched in the present paper, and the enthusiasm kindled by the romances of Scott. Had the writer, who is acknowledged to be at the head of this party, been endowed with a fertility of invention proportioned to his accuracy of observation, and a force corresponding to the delicacy of his genius, it would be difficult to conjecture how far he might have succeeded in triumphing over the obstacles, which have proved fatal to the cause when intrusted to the hands of his partisans. As it is, his beautiful production stands almost alone. We may endeavour, in another paper, by a full examination of the work of Manzoni, and a sketch of the works of his disciples, to enable our readers to decide for themselves, how far we are right in the opinions which we have ventured to express in this.
